

The FBI: A Postponed Problem

By John P. MacKenzie
Washington Post Staff Writer

By asking J. Edgar Hoover to stay on for a 45th year as director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, President-elect Nixon has postponed a problem that yet could vex his Administration.

The problem: What to do with the FBI? What should be its role in the crime-conscious 1960s and 1970s? What sort of agency should it be and what sort of man should head it?

Had the problem ripened under President Johnson there would be little doubt about most of the answers.

News Analysis

Attorney General Ramsey Clark would have argued—and the arguments would have been bruising—for a new director hired from without the Bureau.

Such a Bureau chief would have been charged with maintaining high standards of professionalism and morale but with less of the paramilitary aura of some of the FBI's operations. The FBI would have orders to become domesticated, to join the Justice Department and join the Administration.

No longer would the FBI be permitted to play its loner role in the battle against organized crime, boycotting the inter-agency

"strike forces" of Federal investigators that have now become popular with Republicans as well as Democrats.

No longer would the Bureau be coaxed and negotiated, rather than directed, into taking part in the Justice Department's crime programs and civil rights drives.

Could this civilianizing process actually be accomplished without loss in FBI effectiveness? Can it be done within the Nixon Administration and will Nixon consider it desirable?

Hoover has brought the FBI up from a ragtag band of political hacks in 1924 to a disciplined, respected organization of professionals. He has created at once an enormous asset and, because of the Bureau's super-political independence, an enormous management problem for any President who hopes to govern the executive establishment.

President Johnson, like six Presidents before him, yielded to no one in his admiration for J. Edgar Hoover, an admiration that began more than three decades ago. He declared that

Hoover, who will be 74 on New Year's Day and has needed special executive dispensation to remain in office since he was 70, could stay on "as long as I am in the White House."

Extending the tenure of Hoover, a friend of Nixon's for two decades, for yet another year, serves the interests of both men. Neither Nixon nor his Attorney General, John N. Mitchell, who lacks law enforcement experience, need face at the outset the fundamental management problem.

Hoover, for his part, can wait until the opportune time next year, or the year after or later, to try to shape the FBI's future by helping to choose his successor. His bargaining strength must be at its lowest at a time of year when his term of office is up for renewal in two weeks.

But though it be almost heretical to suggest that Hoover, in robust health and ready to take on his 16th Attorney General, might someday soon be replaced, Nixon probably cannot postpone the day indefinitely.

Meanwhile the Federal Government is being asked

to pour hundreds of millions of dollars a year into upgrading law enforcement, creating new centers of police training and new approaches to crime-fighting that are challenging the FBI for prestige and a place in the public imagination.

The FBI, its jurisdiction expanded many-fold by new ventures into gambling, internal and external security and civil rights, will be harder pressed than ever to shun the "national police force" label. Use of new electronic eavesdropping authority and bigger comput-

ers will make the FBI an even more voluminous — and awesome — repository of information on millions of Americans.

Congress has recently asserted itself by making the FBI directorship a post subject to Senate confirmation. Even a successor with Hoover's blessing may not enjoy the popular acceptance — and the independence — that Hoover earned for himself and his organization. Thus even the FBI may change, offering new opportunities and new challenges for government.

The Washington Post

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1968

A 25